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HOUSE DEMOCRATIC LEADER RESPONDS TO SCHOOL GRADES REPORT

TALLAHASSEE --- Florida House Democratic Leader Franklin Sands (D-Weston) offered the following statement in response to today's release of school grades by the Florida Department of Education.

"I applaud Florida's public school students, teachers and administrators for their hard work during the 2009 school year. I am pleased that Florida's schools are showing improvement. However, our students and teachers deserve better than a one-day assessment of a year's worth of work, which is all that the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) provides.

"Public school accountability and progress should be based on the whole body of work that schools, teachers and students accomplish throughout the year rather than on a one-day snapshot.

"For several years, Florida House Democrats have offered a better system of accountability that Republican legislative leaders have dismissed.

"We have proposed to broaden the FCAT into more than a one-day test of only math, reading and science skills' to an assessment based on a wider array of

subject areas and a year's worth of knowledge. We made some progress in 2008 with the passage of changes in the high school grading formula. That bipartisan effort now needs to be extended to all grades.

“Additionally, Florida House Democrats see the importance of directing more financial resources to low-performing schools that need help. This year's increase in the number of “D” and “F” schools is troubling. According to the Department of Education, the number of schools receiving either a “D” or “F” grade this year increased to 217, up from 200 in 2008.

“Rewarding high-performing schools with more budget flexibility and control over their programs also makes sense, and has been a cornerstone of the Florida House Democratic Caucus education initiatives.

“Meanwhile, while we are likely to see banners in the Capitol touting today's school grades report, the progress comes amid signs that there are many challenges ahead. For instance, in recent days, we have learned that Florida's high school graduation rate is still among the lowest in the nation thanks to a study published in Education Week Magazine. We've also learned, thanks to Stanford University's Center for Research on Education Outcomes, that charter schools are doing a worse job at meeting the needs of students, especially minorities, than public schools.

“Today's findings highlight the importance of Democrats and Republicans working cooperatively toward developing a world-class public education system.”

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